

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 947

By Camper

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus Lois M. DeBerry of Memphis.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus Lois M. DeBerry on the 28th day of July 2013, for on that fateful day an icon of Tennessee politics succumbed to her valiant and hard-fought battle with pancreatic cancer; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry was a lifelong Memphian, and as she lived through the years of her bountiful life, her thoughts, words, and deeds transformed her into a peerless public servant who personified manifold goodness for her community, the State of Tennessee, the United States of America, and people around the world; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry was a tried and true Tennessean, and on that point there was no debate. She was the daughter of the late Samuel and Mary DeBerry, and she was deeply influenced for the whole of her life by the exhortation of her paternal grandfather, Rev. Franklin DeBerry, "I am my brother's keeper"; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry was educated in Memphis public schools, graduated from Hamilton High School, and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from LeMoyne College (now LeMoyne-Owen College) in 1971; and

WHEREAS, she had just begun teaching, when she was beckoned to a higher calling that came in the midst of times of civil unrest and great frustration with the social order of that day; her response to that calling was to offer herself as a candidate for the office of State Representative for Tennessee's House District 91 in the fall of 1972; and

WHEREAS, she won that seat and when sworn into office in Nashville in January 1973, Lois DeBerry marked history by becoming the second African American woman to be elected to the General Assembly and the first to be elected to the General Assembly from the City of

Memphis; it can be rightly said that when the glass ceilings that oppressed women and minorities began to shatter, Lois DeBerry was present and working; and

WHEREAS, Representative DeBerry's inaugural campaign and entrance into the political arena energized a generation of young minority citizens and marked the trailhead of her public pathway through life. Nineteen more campaigns, twenty terms in office, and more than forty years of public service followed, and along that way, she built a rich legacy of public service; and

WHEREAS, so sure was her competence and so strong was her leadership that she timely secured the position of chair of the Shelby County Legislative Delegation, and in 1987, the House elected her Speaker Pro Tempore and she served as such for twenty-four years, the 95th through the 106th General Assemblies; and

WHEREAS, the prowess of her noble leadership in the General Assembly was memorialized when she became the premier bearer of the honorary title, Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus, pursuant to House Joint Resolution 516 of the 107th General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, Representative DeBerry pushed far beyond the call of duty to engage in professional organizations and associations in order to strengthen her capacity to effect change and create fair and just public policies for all citizens; and

WHEREAS, one particular organization which was near and dear to her was the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL), of which she was a founding member in 1977. The organization has grown and matured over its thirty-seven years, wholly supporting research, learning opportunities, and analytic practices for the wise and culturally relevant discernment of policies and laws. She served in many NBCSL leadership capacities from its inception; from 1994 through 1999, she led the organization as its fifth president, and at the time of her death, she held the honorary title of NBCSL President Emeritus; and

WHEREAS, by action of that body during its 37th annual conference in December 2013, which was fittingly held in her hometown of Memphis, NBCSL memorialized President Emeritus DeBerry by naming the conference prayer breakfast in her honor. This breakfast was a sacred event for her, and no finer commemoration of her true being could be established; and

WHEREAS, she was a member of the NAACP, P.U.S.H., N.O.B.L.E., the Memphis Chapter of LINKS, and the Governor's Minority Business Development Advisory Committee;

she rendered sterling service as the board chairperson of the State Legislative Leadership Foundation and was a member of the Education Commission of the States and the Southern Regional Education Board; and

WHEREAS, her interest in cultivating leadership resulted, for three decades, in the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators conducting an annual legislative retreat and training conference that brought people together from all across the State, both young and old, to discuss strategies and formulate policies; she was a devoted, loyal mentor to many young men and women who sought her discipline, guidance, and Christian love. She gave birth to one child, but she became a monumental parental figure in the lives of so very many more; and

WHEREAS, over the years, she became ever more fervent about youth development, admonishing young Tennesseans to perfect leadership skills and actualize a commitment to civic responsibility in their communities and State; and

WHEREAS, she was a founding member of the General Assembly's Select Joint Committee on Children and Youth, and she held mock legislative sessions for middle and high school students from both urban and rural areas; she was an ardent advocate for high quality education for all students because she knew that to be the true path away from poverty. She advocated for access to health care and access to health insurance for all Tennesseans and worked to increase and improve safety in schools for students and teachers. She endeavored to increase access, quality, and safety in licensed child care settings, and in many other ways too legion to enumerate herein, Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus DeBerry directly and indirectly contributed to the greatness of the State of Tennessee and the well-being of its citizens; and

WHEREAS, Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus DeBerry served many years on this legislative body's Corrections Oversight Committee and evinced great concern for the treatment of those incarcerated in our State; accordingly, the Department of Correction honored her by naming its centralized health facility The Lois M. DeBerry Special Needs Facility, which offers health and rehabilitation services for inmates with specific medical and behavioral health needs; and

WHEREAS, an active member of the Memphis Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Lois DeBerry was a recipient of the Mary Church Terrell Award; she was chair of the Social Action Committee of her chapter, and she also served on the National Social Action

Committee for many years. She loved her sorority and is justly memorialized therein, when each year, the Lois M. DeBerry Servant Leader Award is presented to a sorority sister who is following in her influential footsteps; and

WHEREAS, she received accolades and awards too numerous to enumerate, but among those were the NBCSL Legislator of the Year Award in 1994, the William M. Bulger Excellence in State Legislative Leadership Award in 2000, the Dr. Henry Logan Starks Distinguished Service Award in 1999, the *Kansas City Globe's* 100 Most Influential African Americans Distinction in 1997, the Pfizer Visionary Leadership Award in 2006, the Arthur S. Holmon Lifetime Achievement Award in 1998, the Martin Luther King Drum Major Award in 1990, and the Tennessee State University Women of Legend and Merit Award in 2010; and

WHEREAS, a highly influential figure in her party, Representative DeBerry enjoyed the distinct honor of seconding Al Gore's nomination for Vice-President of the United States at the Democratic National Convention in 2000, when she made a rousing speech that energized the thousands present and many more watching the televised broadcast; and

WHEREAS, she was a worldly, widely recognized, and well respected woman, and her titles of honor and duty were numerous, but the whole of her being rested in her belief in salvation that comes from God, the Father, through Jesus Christ. That spiritual strength, born of her faith and loyalty, was an incredible blessing to her beloved house of worship, Greater Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, in the early years of her life, she drew knowledge and strength from that mighty congregation; in the midst of her years, when her stature was stronger and her faith matured, she gave her time, talents, and spiritual strength to Greater Abyssinia, which made that congregation ever stronger. Then, when her Savior spoke to her saying "Enough. Come home," the congregation she so loved sent her home, in both sadness and joy, reaching wide to care for all of the loved ones Lois left behind; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry is survived by her husband of more than thirty years, Charles M. Traugher; her son, Michael Boyer, Jr. and his wife, Carlyn; and her grandsons, Matthew and Carmichael, for whom their grandmother had unfathomable love; and

WHEREAS, Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus Lois M. DeBerry was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for

her fellow citizens in numerous capacities. She served with acumen and alacrity in all of the roles she filled and the positions she occupied, and she earned the respect of her peers, proponents and opponents alike, for the exemplary quality of her work; and

WHEREAS, she leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all her chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the life of this exceptional public servant, human being, and friend of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor the memory and bountiful life of Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus Lois M. DeBerry, reflecting fondly upon her indelible legacy of love, faith, dedication, and public service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our condolences and gratitude to the family of Lois DeBerry for sharing this incredible woman, their dear loved one, with her community, her State, and her nation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.